CHAPTER XIX

INFLUENCING BY EXPOSITION

Speak not at all, in any wise, till you have somewhat to speak; care not for the reward of your speaking, but simply and with undivided mind for the truth of your speaking.

—THOMAS CARLYLE, Essay on *Biography*.

A complete discussion of the rhetorical structure of public speeches requires a fuller treatise than can be undertaken in a work of this nature, yet in this chapter, and in the succeeding ones on "Description," "Narration," "Argument," and "Pleading," the underlying principles are given and explained as fully as need be for a working knowledge, and adequate book references are given for those who would perfect themselves in rhetorical art.

The Nature of Exposition

In the word "expose"—*to lay bare, to uncover, to show the true inwardness of*—we see the foundation-idea of "Exposition." It is the clear and precise setting forth of what the subject really is—it is explanation.

Exposition does not draw a picture, for that would be description. To tell in exact terms what the automobile is, to name its characteristic parts and explain their workings, would be exposition; so would an explanation of the nature of "fear." But to create a mental image of a particular automobile, with its glistening body, graceful lines, and great speed, would be description; and so would a picturing of fear acting on the emotions of a child at night. Exposition and description often intermingle and overlap, but fundamentally they are distinct. Their differences will be touched upon again in the chapter on "Description."

Exposition furthermore does not include an account of how events happened—that is narration. When Peary lectured on his polar discoveries he explained the instruments used for determining latitude and longitude—that was exposition. In picturing his equipment he used description. In telling of his adventures day by day he employed narration. In supporting some of his contentions he used argument. Yet he mingled all these forms throughout the lecture.

Neither does exposition deal with reasons and inferences—that is the field of argument. A series of connected statements intended to convince a prospective buyer that one automobile is better than another, or proofs that the appeal to fear is a wrong method of discipline, would not be exposition. The plain facts as set forth in expository speaking or writing are nearly always the basis of argument, yet the processes are not one. True, the statement of a single significant fact without the addition of one other word may be convincing, but a moment's thought will show that the inference, which completes a chain of reasoning, is made in the mind of the hearer and presupposes other facts held in consideration.[1]

In like manner, it is obvious that the field of persuasion is not open to exposition, for exposition is entirely an intellectual process, with no emotional element.

The Importance of Exposition

The importance of exposition in public speech is precisely the importance of setting forth a matter so plainly that it cannot be misunderstood.

"To master the process of exposition is to become a clear thinker. 'I know, when you do not ask me,'[1] replied a gentleman upon being requested to define a highly complex idea. Now some large concepts defy explicit definition; but no mind should take refuge behind such exceptions, for where definition fails, other forms succeed. Sometimes we feel confident that we have perfect mastery of an idea, but when the time comes to express it, the clearness becomes a haze. Exposition, then, is the

test of clear understanding. To speak effectively you must be able to see your subject clearly and comprehensively, and to make your audience see it as you do."[2]

There are pitfalls on both sides of this path. To explain too little will leave your audience in doubt as to what you mean. It is useless to argue a question if it is not perfectly clear just what is meant by the question. Have you never come to a blind lane in conversation by finding that you were talking of one aspect of a matter while your friend was thinking of another? If two do not agree in their definitions of a Musician, it is useless to dispute over a certain man's right to claim the title.

On the other side of the path lies the abyss of tediously explaining too much. That offends because it impresses the hearers that you either do not respect their intelligence or are trying to blow a breeze into a tornado. Carefully estimate the probable knowledge of your audience, both in general and of the particular point you are explaining. In trying to simplify, it is fatal to "sillify." To explain more than is needed for the purposes of your argument or appeal is to waste energy all around. In your efforts to be explicit do not press exposition to the extent of dulness—the confines are not far distant and you may arrive before you know it.

Some Purposes of Exposition

From what has been said it ought to be clear that, primarily, exposition weaves a cord of understanding between you and your audience. It lays, furthermore, a foundation of fact on which to build later statements, arguments, and appeals. In scientific and purely "information" speeches exposition may exist by itself and for itself, as in a lecture on biology, or on psychology; but in the vast majority of cases it is used to accompany and prepare the way for the other forms of discourse.

Clearness, precision, accuracy, unity, truth, and necessity—these must be the *constant* standards by which you test the efficiency of your

expositions, and, indeed, that of every explanatory statement. This dictum should be written on your brain in letters most plain. And let this apply not alone to the *purposes* of exposition but in equal measure to your use of the

Methods of Exposition

The various ways along which a speaker may proceed in exposition are likely to touch each other now and then, and even when they do not meet and actually overlap, they run so nearly parallel that the roads are sometimes distinct rather in theory than in any more practical respect.

Definition, the primary expository method, is a statement of precise limits.[1] Obviously, here the greatest care must be exercised that the terms of definition should not themselves demand too much definition; that the language should be concise and clear; and that the definition should neither exclude nor include too much. The following is a simple example:

> To expound is to set forth the nature, the significance, the characteristics, and the bearing of an idea or a group of ideas.
>
> —ARLO BATES, *Talks on Writing English*.

Contrast and Antithesis are often used effectively to amplify definition, as in this sentence, which immediately follows the above-cited definition:

> Exposition therefore differs from Description in that it deals directly with the meaning or intent of its subject instead of with its appearance.

This antithesis forms an expansion of the definition, and as such it might have been still further extended. In fact, this is a frequent practise in public speech, where the minds of the hearers often ask for reiteration and expanded statement to help them grasp a subject in its several aspects. This is the very heart of exposition—to amplify and clarify all the terms by which a matter is defined.

Example is another method of amplifying a definition or of expounding an idea more fully. The following sentences immediately succeed Mr. Bates's definition and contrast just quoted:

> A good deal which we are accustomed inexactly to call description is really exposition. Suppose that your small boy wishes to know how an engine works, and should say: "Please describe the steam-engine to me." If you insist on taking his words literally—and are willing to run the risk of his indignation at being wilfully misunderstood—you will to the best of your ability picture to him this familiarly wonderful machine. If you explain it to him, you are not describing but expounding it.

The chief value of example is that it makes clear the unknown by referring the mind to the known. Readiness of mind to make illuminating, apt comparisons for the sake of clearness is one of the speaker's chief resources on the platform—it is the greatest of all teaching gifts. It is a gift, moreover, that responds to cultivation. Read the three extracts from Arlo Bates as their author delivered them, as one passage, and see how they melt into one, each part supplementing the other most helpfully.

Analogy, which calls attention to similar relationships in objects not otherwise similar, is one of the most useful methods of exposition. The following striking specimen is from Beecher's Liverpool speech:

> A savage is a man of one story, and that one story a cellar. When a man begins to be civilized he raises another story. When you christianize and civilize the man, you put story upon story, for you develop faculty after faculty; and you have to supply every story with your productions.

Discarding is a less common form of platform explanation. It consists in clearing away associated ideas so that the attention may be centered on the main thought to be discussed. Really, it is a negative factor in exposition, though a most important one, for it is fundamental to the consideration of an intricately related matter that subordinate and side questions should be set aside in order to bring out the main issue. Here is an example of the method:

> I cannot allow myself to be led aside from the only issue before this jury. It is not pertinent to consider that this prisoner is the husband of a heartbroken woman and that his babes will go through

the world under the shadow of the law's extremest penalty worked upon their father. We must forget the venerable father and the mother whom Heaven in pity took before she learned of her son's disgrace. What have these matters of heart, what have the blenched faces of his friends, what have the prisoner's long and honorable career to say before this bar when you are sworn to weigh only the direct evidence before you? The one and only question for you to decide on the evidence is whether this man did with revengeful intent commit the murder that every impartial witness has solemnly laid at his door.

Classification assigns a subject to its class. By an allowable extension of the definition it may be said to assign it also to its order, genus, and species. Classification is useful in public speech in narrowing the issue to a desired phase. It is equally valuable for showing a thing in its relation to other things, or in correlation. Classification is closely akin to Definition and Division.

This question of the liquor traffic, sirs, takes its place beside the grave moral issues of all times. Whatever be its economic significance—and who is there to question it—whatever vital bearing it has upon our political system—and is there one who will deny it?—the question of the licensed saloon must quickly be settled as the world in its advancement has settled the questions of constitutional government for the masses, of the opium traffic, of the serf, and of the slave—not as matters of economic and political expediency but as questions of right and wrong.

Analysis separates a subject into its essential parts. This it may do by various principles; for example, analysis may follow the order of time (geologic eras), order of place (geographic facts), logical order (a sermon outline), order of increasing interest, or procession to a climax (a lecture on 20th century poets); and so on. A classic example of analytical exposition is the following:

In philosophy the contemplations of man do either penetrate unto God, or are circumferred to nature, or are reflected or reverted upon himself. Out of which several inquiries there do arise three knowledges: divine philosophy, natural philosophy, and human philosophy or humanity. For all things are marked and stamped with this triple character, of the power of God, the difference of nature, and the use of man.

—LORD BACON, *The Advancement of Learning*.[1]

Division differs only from analysis in that analysis follows the inherent divisions of a subject, as illustrated in the foregoing passage, while division arbitrarily separates the subject for convenience of treatment, as in the following none-too-logical example:

> For civil history, it is of three kinds; not unfitly to be compared with the three kinds of pictures or images. For of pictures or images, we see some are unfinished, some are perfect, and some are defaced. So of histories we may find three kinds, memorials, perfect histories, and antiquities; for memorials are history unfinished, or the first or rough drafts of history; and antiquities are history defaced, or some remnants of history which have casually escaped the shipwreck of time.
>
> —LORD BACON, *The Advancement of Learning*.[1]

Generalization states a broad principle, or a general truth, derived from examination of a considerable number of individual facts. This synthetic exposition is not the same as argumentative generalization, which supports a general contention by citing instances in proof. Observe how Holmes begins with one fact, and by adding another and another reaches a complete whole. This is one of the most effective devices in the public speaker's repertory.

> Take a hollow cylinder, the bottom closed while the top remains open, and pour in water to the height of a few inches. Next cover the water with a flat plate or piston, which fits the interior of the cylinder perfectly; then apply heat to the water, and we shall witness the following phenomena. After the lapse of some minutes the water will begin to boil, and the steam accumulating at the upper surface will make room for itself by raising the piston slightly. As the boiling continues, more and more steam will be formed, and raise the piston higher and higher, till all the water is boiled away, and nothing but steam is left in the cylinder. Now this machine, consisting of cylinder, piston, water, and fire, is the steam-engine in its most elementary form. For a steam-engine may be defined as an apparatus for doing work by means of heat applied to water; and since raising such a weight as the piston is a form of doing work, this apparatus, clumsy and inconvenient though it may be, answers the definition precisely.[2]

Reference to Experience is one of the most vital principles in exposition—as in every other form of discourse. "Reference to experience, as here used, means reference to the known. The known is that which the listener has seen, heard, read, felt, believed or done, and which still exists in

his consciousness—his stock of knowledge. It embraces all those thoughts, feelings and happenings which are to him real. Reference to Experience, then, means *coming into the listener's life*.[1]

The vast results obtained by science are won by no mystical faculties, by no mental processes, other than those which are practised by every one of us in the humblest and meanest affairs of life. A detective policeman discovers a burglar from the marks made by his shoe, by a mental process identical with that by which Cuvier restored the extinct animals of Montmartre from fragments of their bones. Nor does that process of induction and deduction by which a lady, finding a stain of a particular kind upon her dress, concludes that somebody has upset the inkstand thereon, differ in any way from that by which Adams and Leverrier discovered a new planet. The man of science, in fact, simply uses with scrupulous exactness the methods which we all habitually, and at every moment, use carelessly.

—THOMAS HENRY HUXLEY, *Lay Sermons*.

Do you set down your name in the scroll of youth, that are written down old with all the characters of age? Have you not a moist eye? a dry hand? a yellow cheek? a white beard? a decreasing leg? an increasing belly? is not your voice broken? your wind short? your chin double? your wit single? and every part about you blasted with antiquity? and will you yet call yourself young? Fie, fie, fie, Sir John!

—SHAKESPEARE, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

Finally, in preparing expository material ask yourself these questions regarding your subject:

What is it, and what is it not?
What is it like, and unlike?
What are its causes, and effects?
How shall it be divided?
With what subjects is it correlated?
What experiences does it recall?
What examples illustrate it?

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

1. What would be the effect of adhering to any one of the forms of discourse in a public address?

2. Have you ever heard such an address?

3. Invent a series of examples illustrative of the distinctions made on pages 232 and 233.

4. Make a list of ten subjects that might be treated largely, if not entirely, by exposition.

5. Name the six standards by which expository writing should be tried.

6. Define any one of the following: (*a*) storage battery; (*b*) "a free hand;" (*c*) sail boat; (*d*) "The Big Stick;" (*e*) nonsense; (*f*) "a good sport;" (*g*) short-story; (*h*) novel; (*i*) newspaper; (*j*) politician; (*k*) jealousy; (*l*) truth; (*m*) matinée girl; (*n*) college honor system; (*o*) modish; (*p*) slum; (*q*) settlement work; (*r*) forensic.

7. Amplify the definition by antithesis.

8. Invent two examples to illustrate the definition (question 6).

9. Invent two analogies for the same subject (question 6).

10. Make a short speech based on one of the following: (*a*) wages and salary; (*b*) master and man; (*c*) war and peace; (*d*) home and the boarding house; (*e*) struggle and victory; (*f*) ignorance and ambition.

11. Make a ten-minute speech on any of the topics named in question 6, using all the methods of exposition already named.

12. Explain what is meant by discarding topics collateral and subordinate to a subject.

13. Rewrite the jury-speech on page 224.

14. Define correlation.

15. Write an example of "classification," on any political, social, economic, or moral issue of the day.

16. Make a brief analytical statement of Henry W. Grady's "The Race Problem," page 36.

17. By what analytical principle did you proceed? (See page 225.)

18. Write a short, carefully generalized speech from a large amount of data on one of the following subjects: (*a*) The servant girl problem; (*b*) cats;

(*c*) the baseball craze; (*d*) reform administrations; (*e*) sewing societies; (*f*) coeducation; (*g*) the traveling salesman.

19. Observe this passage from Newton's "Effective Speaking:"

"That man is a cynic. He sees goodness nowhere. He sneers at virtue, sneers at love; to him the maiden plighting her troth is an artful schemer, and he sees even in the mother's kiss nothing but an empty conventionality."

Write, commit and deliver two similar passages based on your choice from this list: (*a*) "the egotist;" (*b*) "the sensualist;" (*c*) "the hypocrite;" (*d*) "the timid man;" (*e*) "the joker;" (*f*) "the flirt;" (g) "the ungrateful woman;" (*h*) "the mournful man." In both cases use the principle of "Reference to Experience."

20. Write a passage on any of the foregoing characters in imitation of the style of Shakespeare's characterization of Sir John Falstaff, page 227.

[1] Argumentation will be outlined fully in a subsequent chapter.

[1] *The Working Principals of Rhetoric*, J. F. Genung.

[2] *How to Attract and Hold an Audience*, J. Barg Esenwein.

[1] On the various types of definition see any college manual of Rhetoric.

[1] Quoted in *The Working Principles of Rhetoric*, J. F. Genung.

[1] Quoted in *The Working Principles of Rhetoric*, J. F. Genung.

[2] G. C. V. Holmes, quoted in *Specimens of Exposition*, H. Lamont.

[1] *Effective Speaking*, Arthur Edward Phillips. This work covers the preparation of public speech in a very helpful way.